

Road project stretches from Kabul to Bagram

By Bruce J. Huffman

The passage between the cities of Kabul and Bagram is more than just a vital trade route between the nation's capitol and the largest Coalition base in Afghanistan; over the years it's also been a conduit for the spread of knowledge and culture. Since the time of Alexander the Great through the Soviet occupation and even now, this route, once a tributary of the famed Silk Road, has connected isolated tribal societies with other civilizations, their products and ideas. Decades of continuous war have severely damaged the road and the only maintenance that's been done since the Russians paved it 34 years ago has been by locals filling potholes with dirt. In support of Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is rebuilding the tattered road, which will help extend Afghan governance and security to the people, and

stimulate economic growth.

According to Patricia Cason, an Afghanistan Engineer District Construction Representative responsible for the project,



During peak construction about 200 Afghan laborers are employed on the Kabul to Bagram road project. The road is scheduled to be completed late 2009.

the roadwork was broken into two main sections and awarded to two different companies. The southern portion near Kabul was awarded to Technologists, Inc. for \$15,635,842 and the northern portion to the Amerifa Company for \$18,330,000. The Notices to Proceed were issued in October 2007, and the entire road is scheduled to be completed by fall 2009. The total road length is about 40 kilometers and will be 10 meters wide with paved shoulders in some sections. According to Cason, in the original contract, workers were to construct a parallel temporary road east of the existing road to divert traffic, then grind up and redo the existing road. After negotiations with the Afghan Government, the contracts were modified and the existing road is being left in place, and the new road is being constructed alongside, essentially creating a four-lane road.

The companies began site preparation such as clearing, grubbing and constructing culverts in winter of 2007. According to Cason, throughout the construction, work was halted several times to ensure worker's safety while portions of the road could be demined and cleared of unexploded ordinance. "There were also a few delays because of Real Estate problems along the route, but the contractors worked closely with the villagers to resolve



Patricia Cason, AED Construction Representative, carefully documents daily roadwork activity in her field book.



An Afghan equipment operator prepares the substrate on the Kabul/Bagram Road using a Komatsu Motor Grader.

them," said John Wessel, another Corps of Engineers Construction Representative assigned to the project. According to Wessel, it's common to experience delays due to extreme weather and terrain, unexploded ordinance left behind from decades of war, and Real Estate disputes, because

there are is no centralized location to keep Real Estate records in Afghanistan.

Once work resumed, the existing road's culverts were extended under the new road, and areas were tarped-off and heated with wood burning stoves to keep the concrete from freezing. Special care

was taken to prepare the sub-base and base, and workers continuously water and test materials for the right consistency. “Problems with roads begin with what’s below the surface,” said Cason. Her experience as a geologist for the Corps of Engineers Sacramento District has been invaluable during the road’s construction, and she pays close attention as materials are tested and re-tested. According to Cason, the asphalt on the new road will be 15 centimeters thick, a lot thicker than the existing Soviet road which was built in just six months 34 years ago.

“There’s a lot of traffic on this road, ranging from military convoys and trucks hauling loads of aggregate,



An Afghan worker removes oversized rocks with a hand pick so the substrate can be rolled and compacted. A jingle truck loaded with bags of coal travels south on the existing road.

to horse-drawn carts and pedestrians,” said Wessel. “They have even begun building a city called New Kabul along the route and the Afghan Government is

giving land to people to help establish another community along the road near Bagram.” Additionally, the U.S. Agency for International Development is building a new power plant on the route and Department of Defense food supplier Supreme even has a major warehouse facility on the road. “There is great progress being made here, and this road is very important to the people of Afghanistan,” said Cason. “The quality is equal to that of roads being built in the United States, and the people driving by can see that there are Afghan workers on the project,” said Cason. “You get a lot of satisfaction out of what’s being done, and there’s a great sense of pride and accomplishment from the Afghans who are working very hard to rebuild their nation.” 🇦🇫



AED Construction Representatives Patricia Cason and John Wessel discuss the road project with Afghan Quality Assurance Representatives Wahidullah Amin, left, and Engineer Nazuk Mir.